

OFFICIAL FEEDBACK FORM

DIALOGUE DATE	Monday, 10 May 2021 14:00 GMT -04:00
DIALOGUE TITLE	Organic as a solution to meet increasing demands from consumers and global markets, to address environmental pressures, and to achieve the UN sustainable development goals.
CONVENED BY	Organic Trade Association
DIALOGUE EVENT PAGE	https://summitdialogues.org/dialogue/11909/
DIALOGUE TYPE	Independent
GEOGRAPHICAL FOCUS	No borders, United States of America

The outcomes from a Food Systems Summit Dialogue will be of use in developing the pathway to sustainable food systems within the locality in which they take place. They will be a valuable contribution to the national pathways and also of interest to the different workstreams preparing for the Summit: the Action Tracks, Scientific Groups and Champions as well as for other Dialogues.

1. PARTICIPATION

TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

PARTICIPATION BY AGE RANGE

0 0-18 8 19-30 30 31-50 16 51-65 3 66-80 0 80+

PARTICIPATION BY GENDER

23 Male 34 Female 0 Prefer not to say or Other

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IN EACH SECTOR

15	Agriculture/crops	5	Education		Health care
	Fish and aquaculture		Communication	1	Nutrition
1	Livestock	6	Food processing	3	National or local government
	Agro-forestry	5	Food retail, markets		Utilities
2	Environment and ecology	1	Food industry		Industrial
18	Trade and commerce		Financial Services		Other

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS FROM EACH STAKEHOLDER GROUP

24	Small/medium enterprise/artisan		Workers and trade union
7	Large national business		Member of Parliament
4	Multi-national corporation		Local authority
3	Small-scale farmer	2	Government and national institution
	Medium-scale farmer		Regional economic community
2	Large-scale farmer		United Nations
	Local Non-Governmental Organization		International financial institution
6	International Non-Governmental Organization	3	Private Foundation / Partnership / Alliance
	Indigenous People		Consumer group
6	Science and academia		Other

2. PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

HOW DID YOU ORGANIZE THE DIALOGUE SO THAT THE PRINCIPLES WERE INCORPORATED, REINFORCED AND ENHANCED?

The Organic Trade Association's Sustainable Food Trade Action Council aims to strengthen the organic sectors voice in climate policy and sustainability issues and boost the sector's efforts to create an environmentally friendly, sustainable food system. Council members actively measure and refine their sustainability programs and chart their climate strategy. This established cohort of sustainable-minded businesses is always eager to work together to identify solutions that progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We recognize the complexity of the global systematic change required to achieve these goals, and that diverse stakeholder perspectives from all aspects of the supply chain need to play an active role in identifying solutions; we were fully prepared to take advantage of this opportunity to organize this important discussion. When we heard about the opportunity to organize an Independent Dialogue for the UN Food Systems Summit, we immediately started assembling a team and scheduling meetings to convene a Dialogue. We scheduled our Dialogue for May 10th, to assure that we would have time to reflect and summarize our findings to submit by July 23rd for inclusion in the synthesis incorporated in the Sept 2021 Summit. Our Dialogue hosting team consisted of 1 Convener, 1 Curator, 6 Facilitators, and 6 staff notetakers – all of whom took advantage of the Curator/Facilitator trainings made available online through the Summit Gateway platform. The hosting team met 4 times prior to the live dialogue event to collaborate on planning, discuss subtopics in the breakout group categories identified, build trust and rapport among the Curator and Facilitators, and outline a framework for allocating seats in our Dialogue to assure that attendees represented a wide range of diverse experiences and perspectives. We identified targeted prospects for inclusion in this Dialogue and sent personalized calls to action to participate, but also cast our invitations wide to allow for broad attendance and assure that everyone felt welcome to engage.

HOW DID YOUR DIALOGUE REFLECT SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE PRINCIPLES?

The Organic Trade Association's Sustainable Food Trade Action Council is aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and six Council leaders immediately stepped up to embrace the Summit Principles of Engagement and Facilitate one of the 6 breakout groups involved in our Dialogue topic. Once we reached maximum capacity attendance in our Dialogue, we took a close look at the participant list and selected thoughtful assignments to assure we were embracing multi-stakeholder inclusivity within each breakout group cohort also. The hosting team outlined three guiding questions to approach our Dialogue discussion - In what ways is organic today meeting our needs for sustainable growth and development? What are the tensions getting in the way of progress? What solutions can be pursued and who needs to be included in the conversation so that we can continue to grow in an equitable, healthy and sustainable way? Structuring our Dialogue around these three guiding questions allowed us to remain focused on identifying tangible successes, challenges, and solutions. This environment encouraged participants to highlight and complement the work of their peers which in turn built trust and helped to foster idea sharing. All Facilitators were trained to be thoughtful shepherds of the conversation, encourage respectful debate, bring new viewpoints into the discussion, make all participants feel comfortable engaging, and keep the outcomes focused on solutions we can aim to collectively execute.

DO YOU HAVE ADVICE FOR OTHER DIALOGUE CONVENORS ABOUT APPRECIATING THE PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT?

At first glance the Principles of Engagement seem like a fairly straightforward and respectful approach to working together with peers and colleagues – but in reality each of the principles actually take quite a lot of careful attention to truthfully achieve. If we act with the urgency that this work requires, we need to be actively creating change by any means possible starting now, but many groups are still in discussion phases about how to approach these complex issues. Meanwhile, we are losing time. Many diverse stakeholder groups have committed to the Summit Goals and pledge to work towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, but how many have actually taken actions on solutions towards those goals after agreeing that we need to act now? We were very intentional in outlining a framework for allocating seats in our Dialogue, and identifying diverse multi-stakeholder individuals who should be included in this conversation, and yet our biggest takeaway is that we need to bring new and different viewpoints into the fold in order to make progress towards addressing real challenges that are hindering progress. It is easy to fall into a pattern of collaborating with your own network of likeminded individuals with aligned viewpoints, and often difficult and uncomfortable to break loose from that environment. However, recognizing the complexity of these issues demands that we seek out those who have different views in order to find opportunities for common ground, compromise, and shared progress. Being respectful, complementing the work of others, and building trust are easy principles to abide by with our peers, but in the context of this engagement, and with the purpose of achieving the UN Summit Goals, it is imperative for Summit Dialogues to foster opportunities to practice those principles of engagement with those you disagree with too. I urge other Dialogue convenors to seek out the next tier of stakeholder perspectives in your network to include in the conversation, so that we can align more groups around common goals for more widespread success.

3. METHOD

The outcomes of a Dialogue are influenced by the method that is used.

DID YOU USE THE SAME METHOD AS RECOMMENDED BY THE CONVENORS REFERENCE MANUAL?

Yes

No

4. DIALOGUE FOCUS & OUTCOMES

MAJOR FOCUS

Organic agriculture is a pathway to a sustainable food system. It needs to be a part of the solution in finding ways to meet increasing demands from consumers and global markets, address environmental pressures, and achieve the UN's 17 sustainable development goals. This dialogue explored ways policy makers can use organic to help address global challenges.

How does organic achieve Sustainable Development Goal #2 of zero hunger and Goal #3 of ensuring good health and wellbeing? Twenty-six percent of the world is food insecure, and a staggering 21% of children under 5 have stunted growth due to malnutrition. In the US, 35 million are food insecure. Organic agriculture practices can help to turn that around. Studies of 60 different crops across 6 continents have shown that organic and conventional yields are almost equal (organic yields are just 8-9% lower than conventional) when organic is done well and certain organic practices like crop diversification and crop rotations are applied. Using organic practices can be a significant part of the solution in achieving zero hunger, and because it doesn't use synthetic chemicals and other inputs that conventional does, it also achieves the goal of ensuring good health and wellbeing. In addition to yield returns, organic also provides financial and ecological returns.

How does organic meet Sustainable Development Goal #8 of decent work and economic growth, Goal #1 of eliminating poverty, and Goal #10 of reducing inequalities? We know farming and rural communities struggle more than most with half of farms in the US losing money in 2019. Family farms are often being hit the hardest. Organic can address these challenges. A National Academy of Sciences study in 2020 found 50% higher profitability for organic agriculture, and research by the Organic Trade Association has shown that counties with a large organic agriculture presence (organic "hotspots") have a median income that is \$2,000 higher than in non-organic counties.

How does organic make meaningful steps towards Goal #13 of climate action? Science has shown that organic farms sequester 26% more carbon than conventional farms; emit 18% less global warming potential, and use around 50% less new reactive nitrogen.

How does organic achieve Goals #14 and #15 of protecting life below water and life on land? Organic farming has a proven ability to increase biodiversity by some 30%. Organic farms have been shown to have higher levels of beneficial insects such as pollinators, lady bugs, and parasitoid wasps, and worms. Organic also avoids over 700 toxic chemicals and pesticides because regulations require farmers to use non-chemical techniques such as crop rotation, selecting resistant varieties, using nutrient and water management, and providing habitats for the natural enemies of pests. This is a stark difference from highly toxic conventional practices and inputs.

Three guiding questions were explored in our dialogue: In what ways is organic today meeting our needs for sustainable growth and development? What are the tensions getting in the way of progress? What solutions can be pursued and who needs to be included in the conversation so that we can continue to grow in an equitable, healthy and sustainable way? The virtual event was attended by 60 people. The Dialogue included six break-out sessions for stakeholders to consider: (1) Human health and wellbeing, (2) Socially responsible economic growth, (3) Feeding the world, (4) International trade, (5) Climate action, and (6) Innovation. Each breakout group was facilitated by a member of the SFTAC, and roughly 10 diverse stakeholders participated in each discussion group. Paul Schiefer of Amy's Kitchen, an Organic Trade Association Board member who chairs the SFTAC, was the Curator of this Independent Dialogue. He encouraged participants to talk about the role of agroecology--in the form of organic agriculture--as a paradigm for transforming the food system to safeguard human rights, equity and food sovereignty so that no one is hungry, poor, or left behind. He and others pointed out that basically, the health of our food affects the health of people and our planet.

ACTION TRACKS

- ✓ Action Track 1: Ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all
- ✓ Action Track 2: Shift to sustainable consumption patterns
- ✓ Action Track 3: Boost nature-positive production
- ✓ Action Track 4: Advance equitable livelihoods
- ✓ Action Track 5: Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress

KEYWORDS

- ✓ Finance
- ✓ Innovation
- ✓ Human rights
- ✓ Women & Youth Empowerment
- ✓ Policy
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- ✓ Governance
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- ✓ Environment and Climate

MAIN FINDINGS

Organic offers a host of benefits for the environment and for overall human wellbeing and longevity. Organic farms sequester 26% more carbon than conventional farms and increase biodiversity by some 30%. Organic agricultural practices also build and foster healthy soil, mitigate climate change, conserve water use, reduce pesticide consumption/exposure, boost pollinator populations, allow for long-term self-sustaining farming viability to meet the growing needs of our planet and are ultimately more resilient to extreme weather conditions. Our Dialogue participants identified a handful of key strategies necessary to take advantage of the host of benefits that organic offers, to expand on this model and make organic part of the solution to achieving a global sustainable food system.

Federal policies: There are many federal policies that could be improved to promote the development of equitable organic food systems. Subsidy reform is needed; there should be long-term incentives for sustainable farming, rather than subsidies for conventional farmers not using sustainable practices. Crop insurance reform is needed to provide an adequate safety net for organic farmers. Increased support and funding to help farmers through the organic transition process is needed. Increased capital and technical assistance is needed, and more research on organic agriculture needs to be underway. Extension support will help us understand on-farm challenges and solutions, and science-based information and tools need to be more accessible. Innovative solutions to biodiversity, seed development, and decentralized ways of measuring soil carbon should be explored. We need to better manage externalities, and create a fair playing field so that organic can grow and create a larger impact.

Inclusion and empowerment: Organic agriculture has been shown to improve rural and local economies by offering a profitable farming option and by creating more farming community jobs. The hotspots study by the Organic Trade Association shows that organic agriculture boosts household incomes and reduces poverty levels. Being an organic hotspot increases median household income by over \$2,000, and lowers a county's poverty rate by as much as 1.35%. It offers a way for farmers to work in safe conditions and be paid a living wage. But the opportunity of organic farming is still out of reach for many farmers, especially marginalized farmers, and too often people of color and marginalized communities are left out of the conversation entirely. It is important to include support of organizations that represent people of color, and support the growth and development of underrepresented communities. Farmers, farmworkers, indigenous cultures, and non-white people are missing from these conversations, and need to be included to identify viable solutions. Financial and technical assistance is especially critical in communities of color and indigenous communities. Technology advancements can help with affordability and accessibility. Investment in the development of local food hubs, enabling schools to have better access to organic options, and empowering communities with the tools they need to feed and nourish themselves is critical. **Consumer education:** Consumers around the world have significant leverage in influencing the direction of agricultural and food policy. If consumers demand a clean, environmentally-friendly and sustainable food system through their purchasing decisions, businesses and governments will take heed and adopt policies to encourage such a system. But consumers need to be educated on the benefits of organic. Education to consumers should focus on the benefits of organic to environmental health and human health. The more we can connect organic as a climate solution, the more compelling it is for the younger generation. We need to elevate the multi-spectrum story of organic regulation and oversight, and use that story to educate consumers about the trust and integrity behind the organic seal. While there is confusion over competing label claims, this is an opportunity to educate consumers on all the benefits of supporting organic. Consumers want accountability and transparency in their food, and being honest and accountable are the main objectives of everyone under the organic umbrella. **Global accountability and connectiveness:** It is important to be engaged with international communities and trade partners. We need to create an environment that can help ensure the viability of organic farming practices and sustain growth and expansion; that involves getting our global partners to sign onto organic practices. It is important to make decisions on transportation, packaging, and water use that continuously move towards the sustainable development goals. There is a need for a national and international organic integrity database which can encourage transparency and fair trade, and an international distribution system that can ensure integrity and transparency throughout supply chains and among organic certifiers. We need global information sharing so all farmers around the world may have consistent sufficient yields without the use of GMO seeds. Organic can be used to empower and create better outcomes in disadvantaged parts of the world as well as help keep local traditional farming systems viable. Leaning into global organic is about helping to create accessibility to small scale disadvantaged farmers. Focusing on the UN Sustainable Development Goals begins to move us globally in the right direction for global agriculture and production

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 1/6

Human Health and Wellbeing:

This group defined human health and wellbeing as providing access to nutritious food that can be trusted and contribute to mental health, job security, living wages, and decreases chemical exposure. Organic helps eliminate direct exposure to over 700 toxic chemicals and pesticides while also providing nourishment. Accessibility is a challenge. Accountability and transparency need to be maintained in the standards. Inclusivity should allow growers, farmers, and knowledge-based cultures to have a voice and equal access to the organic marketplace in order to be fully engaged in progressive solutions.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 2/6

Socially Responsible Economic Growth:

This group recognized that it came up with more questions than answers. Participants were predominantly white and lacked diversity. There are limitations on land access and inclusion for diverse farmers. "Broken food systems are a broken capital system," they pointed out. Representation needs to be diverse and inclusive. Farmers face barriers to transitioning, and some conventional farmers are still skeptical of organic. The more we can understand and account for social and economic externalities the more obvious it is that organic is the most valuable way to scale our global food systems

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 3/6

Feeding the World

Participants noted that while it is easy to define what the organic sector is doing well right now, it may not be good enough for the future. More education is needed on what organic is, and what it means in grocery stores and on labels. Would it be possible to communicate nutrition in terms of food per acre? It is important to address the overall inconsistency of supplies of organic food and organic growing conditions for people of color. Organic is proven to work and be scalable, but governments need to support that development. If all farmers adopt organic practices, we can increase food production and lower yield gap (organic yields are just 8-9% lower than conventional). More policies and investment are needed to support this goal.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 4/6

International Trade:

International trade of organic products is growing. Initially, trade primarily consisted of finished products. Now, mostly ingredients are crossing borders to fuel the processing industry. Some companies are experiencing growth but there are not enough organic ingredients in the supply chain to meet demand. With the right government support and incentives, this could change. Concerns center on transparency and fraud. Agronomic scientists encourage small farmers to lead the conversation on what would help them thrive using organic practices. We need to be more emphatic, listen, and learn from farmers, not burden them with being the solution. Farmers often export their organic agriculture for the economic incentive, and they are left with little or no access to the products for themselves. We need to help farmers support themselves and allow them access to the same organic products they are working so hard to provide to others outside of their own communities.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 5/6

Climate Action:

Organic is already proven as a climate solution. We are past the stage of exploring the viability of organic as a solution; we are ready to scale it up to achieve greater impact across the globe. Participants discussed the successes of organic to provide substantial benefits for food systems and textiles contributing to biodiversity, soil health, water quality and benefits for farmers. Organic farms sequester 26% more carbon than conventional farms; emit 18% less global warming potential and use around 50% less new reactive nitrogen; they also reduce human exposure to toxic chemicals, provide more income in rural areas, and more resilience because of diversity and soil health. Misinformation about organic has been a barrier, showing the need for more consumer education and transparency. Organic farmers in general have not been leading voices on climate change so they need to play catch-up to bring attention to organic's important role. There is a need for more data collection, as well as technical support to help continuously improve standards.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 6/6

Innovation:

Years and years of advancements shaped innovations to create what is now the baseline for organic. Continuous improvement is about learning from the past and initiating new developments. Issues include hurdles to obtain improved seeds and genetic ownership as well access to land and more markets. The organic sector must collaborate and adhere to the three pillars of innovation: fairness, soil health, and biodiversity. "Are you meeting people where they are?" this group advised stakeholders to ask themselves.

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AREAS OF DIVERGENCE

While this entire group firmly believes in the power of organic as the best option, there are points of divergence in the spectrum of organic. Some push for more pure, strict standards for animal, social, environmental impacts while others are more focused on making organic bigger, broader, and more accessible across the globe. The purity of organic vs large scale accessibility and economic viability/growth is a friction within the organic community.

The organic community is a passionate group and highly accountable to ourselves in aiming to be the best, most transparent and trustworthy we can be. Points of divergence within the organic community really just point to the fact that we are all trying to remain highly accountable to our goals and we are critical of ourselves while striving for continuous improvement. The organic sector acknowledges there is a need to grow and improve the public/private partnership that defines the U.S. organic system. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Organic Program has been continuously evolving since 1997 when the first proposed rules to establish national organic standards were published. The organic sector in the United States has expanded greatly in the last two decades, and that expansion has made it critical that the government fulfill its role in its partnership. Recognizing that need, the Organic Trade Association has been the chief advocate for the recently introduced Continuous Improvement and Accountability in Organic Standards legislation which lays out a path forward for the USDA to advance organic.

With that background on this area of divergence in the organic community at large, it is noted that there were no stark debates or harshly opposing viewpoints present in our dialogue, likely because our stakeholders were mostly likeminded organic advocates.

We recognize the need to bring more viewpoints into the conversation, and will now aim to identify what the barriers are to bringing others into these conversations. Our participants recognized that this conversation needs to bring new people into the conversation, especially farmers and BIPOC, so that points of divergence can be identified and compromises and solutions can be achieved. Participants agreed that we need to move past conversations of agreeance with our peers and purposefully give opposing stakeholders a seat at the same table in order to get to the next level of growth and development towards the UN sustainable development goals.

The question is – how does the organic community achieve this so we can start to push barriers and extend our reach and impact? How does the global agricultural community get to a point where we can articulate the fundamental divergences holding us back and identify a collective path forward?

Conversations need to include diverse stakeholder perspectives, but although this fact is recognized it is not achieved in reality. This conversation, the organic industry, and organic consumers need to be more diverse but identifying immediate actions and long-term solutions are both challenging. Lending practices and land access have been designed to be intentionally discriminatory, but tangible solutions towards reconciling that are debated. Identity politics and income inequality results in deeply polarized communities. Organic needs to be an affordable and accessible option for farmers and consumers and a complex and comprehensive approach is needed to create and sustain systematic change.

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ATTACHMENTS AND RELEVANT LINKS

RELEVANT LINKS

- **Organic Trade Association Advocacy on Climate Change**
<https://ota.com/climate>
- **Organic Trade Association Organic Oversight and Enforcement**
<https://ota.com/advocacy/critical-issues/organic-oversight-enforcement>
- **Organic Trade Association's Sustainable Food Trade Action Council**
<https://ota.com/membership/get-involved-member-communities/sustainable-food-trade-action-council>
- **Organic Trade Association Organic Hot Spots**
<https://ota.com/hotspots>
- **Federal Chapter on Organic Hot Spots**
https://ota.com/sites/default/files/indexed_files/HarvestingOpportunity_FederalReserve_Chapter16_OrganicTradeAssociation.pdf
- **The Organic Center's Soil Health on Organic Farms**
<https://www.organic-center.org/soil-health-organic-farms>
- **The Organic Center's Effects of Organic Farming Practices on Nitrogen Pollution**
<https://www.organic-center.org/effects-organic-farming-practices-nitrogen-pollution>
- **The Organic Center's Boosting Carbon Sequestration on Organic Farms**
<https://www.organic-center.org/site/boosting-carbon-sequestration-organic-farms>
- **The Organic Center's Protecting Organic Farmers From Pesticides**
<https://www.organic-center.org/site/protecting-organic-farmers-pesticides>